

**Testimony Submitted by Jade Thomas to the Appropriations Committee**  
**HB 5307: “An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023”**  
**Connecticut General Assembly**  
**February 17, 2022**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Jade Thomas and I am the Connecticut Early Care and Education Policy Fellow at All Our Kin. We are a Connecticut-based, nationally-recognized nonprofit organization that serves nearly 700 family child care educators, who in turn educate and care for over 3,400 children from communities in Connecticut. I am submitting testimony regarding HB 5307 “An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023”. All Our Kin and the educators we work with are asking for \$700 million in immediate relief funds to stabilize Connecticut’s child care industry.

**About All Our Kin**

All Our Kin has worked in Connecticut for two decades to ensure that children have the foundation they need to succeed in school and life. We serve home-based child care providers in New Haven, Bridgeport, Stamford, Norwalk, Danbury and Hartford. Through our programs, child care professionals succeed as business owners; working parents find stable, high-quality care for their children; and children gain an educational foundation that lays the groundwork for achievement in school and beyond. We recognize that in order to achieve an equitable and just society for all, we must care for not only our youngest children, but the parents, caregivers, and communities that nurture them.

**About Family Child Care**

We like to say that family child care is a triple win for Connecticut: home-based entrepreneurs start child care businesses that support their own families, provide a community service, and contribute to the broader economy; parents access safe, nurturing care for their children; and children receive the quality early learning experiences that lay the groundwork for success in school and beyond. Family child care offers a number of unique benefits including:

- Intimate, family-like settings
- Located in residential communities
- Non-traditional operating hours
- Care for mixed-age groups
- Language, culture, and values that reflect the communities served

**The Need for Child Care in Connecticut**

The need for high quality care in Connecticut continues to grow. Before the coronavirus, the Office of Early Childhood identified a shortage of 51,000 child care slots for infants and toddlers. Eighty percent of brain development occurs during this period, when scientists tell us children have the most to gain from stable, nurturing relationships with experienced educators. In 2018, the Center for American Progress estimated that 44% of Connecticut’s population lives in a child care desert with little or no access to quality child care. Since 2019, the supply of high-

quality child care has decreased, as hundreds of child care programs have closed due to rising costs and shrinking enrollment during the pandemic.

Without consistent, high-quality child care families have a hard time maintaining employment and children are not prepared to enter school. The Governor's proposed budget does not include the investment needed to bolster Connecticut's child care industry, support our workforce, or ensure that all children build the foundation they need to succeed later in life.

### **Investing in Early Care and Education: Expanding Access to High Quality Care**

Connecticut's economy cannot thrive without a robust early care and education system. High quality early learning opportunities benefit children, families, and the economy. All children and their families should have access to affordable high-quality care. However, the current system is broken. In Connecticut 154,070 children have the potential need for child care. However, there is a supply of 111,200 child care slots<sup>1</sup>. Educators are compensated based on what families can afford and not what it costs to provide high quality. According to Connecticut Voices for Children, the average annual cost of care for an infant or toddler in Connecticut is over \$15,000 per year<sup>2</sup>. Providers have bridged the gap between affordability and the true cost of care for decades. Many family child care providers have sacrificed their personal income, health and retirement benefits to bridge this gap. Today they carry significant debt and experience high rates of stress and burnout, contributing to decisions to close their programs. This model is not sustainable. Without significant investment programs will be forced to permanently close their doors.

We are asking that the legislature invest \$700 million in immediate relief to stabilize the child care workforce, so parents don't lose child care and children don't lose stable caregivers at a time when they need them most. Research from "the National Forum on Early Childhood Policy and Programs has found that high quality early childhood programs can yield a \$4 – \$9 dollar return per \$1 invested"<sup>3</sup>. Investing in our youngest children is a moral, financial, and developmental imperative. This investment could be used to fund wage supplements and adequate health insurance coverage for early educators, and increase child care subsidies.

- **Wage Supplements:** On average child care workers in Connecticut make less than \$33,000 per year. In 2018, United Way estimated that the Household Survival Budget (the actual bare-minimum costs of basic necessities) was more than \$90,000 on average for a family of four. In some parts of the state this estimate jumps to over 100,000 per year for a family of four<sup>4</sup>. Many educators are forced to choose between supporting their own families and leaving the child care industry altogether. Investing in a wage supplement for early educators will help retain the skilled workforce, ensuring that educators can continue to nurture the minds of our youngest residents, support parents' employment, provide for their own families.
- **Health Insurance:** Many educators don't have access to adequate health insurance coverage. Currently, Covid vaccinations are not approved for children under the age of 5. Through the pandemic educators have kept their doors open despite uncertainty and surging Covid rates. Offering health coverage to early educators ensures that educators can support their own mental and physical well-being.

1. <https://childcaregap.org/assets/onePagers/Connecticut.pdf>

2. [https://ctvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CRR-SOEC\\_FCCs\\_Just-Research.pdf](https://ctvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CRR-SOEC_FCCs_Just-Research.pdf), p.13

3. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-early-childhood-program-effectiveness/>

4. [https://alice.ctunitedway.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020ALICEReport\\_CT\\_FINAL-8-20-20.pdf](https://alice.ctunitedway.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020ALICEReport_CT_FINAL-8-20-20.pdf), p.4

- **Increase Child Care Subsidies:** We ask that the committee allot additional funds in order to raise eligibility to families up to the state median income. This will help to ensure low and middle-income families can access high quality care while also, ensuring programs are receiving the reimbursement needed to fully cover their costs.

Thank you for your time today.

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1. <https://childcaregap.org/assets/onePagers/Connecticut.pdf>
2. [https://ctvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CRR-SOEC\\_FCCs\\_Just-Research.pdf](https://ctvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CRR-SOEC_FCCs_Just-Research.pdf), p.13
3. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-early-childhood-program-effectiveness/>
4. [https://alice.ctunitedway.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020ALICEReport\\_CT\\_FINAL-8-20-20.pdf](https://alice.ctunitedway.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020ALICEReport_CT_FINAL-8-20-20.pdf), p.4